

June 24, 2009

Hi, Charlene,

Da just visited us here in sunny southern California, along with Bonnie, and last night we treated them to dinner at the Long Beach Yacht Club, along with Uncle Pete and Laura. Cousin Nick couldn't come since he had to attend his Administration class (to become a future administrator in a high school) last night from 5-8 p.m.

We had everyone sit at the big round table in the corner with the large windows. It's a great view of the sailboats, rowing skiffs and an occasional surfboard skimming by. I sat across from (Great Uncle) Fred and between my brothers, Mike/DA and Pete. The conversation was hill blast with lots of laughing. It was lots of fun to hear the repartee between Mike and Pete. They are extra funny together. We gobbled up fish and/or steak and yummy chocolately desserts. DA had someone take our picture.

Speaking of desserts, I must relate the camp story of Aunt Patsy and the five banana splits. It took place one early summer evening at Camp Stonycroft in Michigan. After dinner, we junior counselors hiked along the dirt road into the tiny town of Shelby where a small, rickety store sold sodas and ice cream. It had red and white checkered curtains on the windows and indoor picnic tables plus one juke box.

Inside, a sign hung behind the counter. The message said in chalk:, **"BANANA SPLIT CHAMPION: Larry White, 4 ½ banana splits at one sitting."** Patsy said, "Oh, I could beat that record any day." Pudgy challenged her that she couldn't. After all, she was just a skinny 14 year old girl. We kids all started betting and wondered who was going to pay for the splits. Pudgy promised he'd pay but only if Patsy actually beat the posted record.

The background to this story is that Patsy and Penny never got to eat sweets at home. Mother never baked and there would be no cookies, chips, cakes, candy in the house. My biggest dream was that I would get "lost" overnight in a 5 and 10 cent store because Mother would somehow forget me until the next morning and I'd be locked in for the night. I would spend that delightful night sampling all the candies in the store, non stop.

So when Patsy said she wanted to challenge the banana-split record, I thought she could do it from a desire standpoint. I just wasn't sure that her stomach could hold it all. Were her eyes bigger than her stomach? Patsy was interested in both: the thought of non-stop ice cream plus the glory of her name on the chalkboard as the new champion. With anticipation she sat at the chrome counter. They brought out the first

banana split. It was a doozie: an entire banana split in half, topped with 3 scoops of ice cream (vanilla, chocolate, strawberry), chocolate sauce, nuts, whipped cream and a cherry on the top.

Patsy gobbled her mouthwatering treat down in no time and said, "Next, please". There it came, another banana split beauty. After eating most of it, her cheeks looked full and she slowed down her bitefuls just a tad. #2 took a little longer to finish.

Mostly full, but also still full of fight/greed, Patsy said, "Ready for #3." It arrived, but somehow this one didn't look so yummy [although it was identical to the other two]. Halfway through the third split, Patsy began shivering and said, "I'm cold. Can someone cover me with jackets?" The rest of us took off jackets and sweaters and soon her hunkered shoulders were covered with warmth.

#4 was hard. Really tough. Patsy was already full and uncomfortable. The ice cream was tasteless cold. Whipped cream oozed out of her lips. Her eyes were squeezed shut in stuffing agony. The rest of us shouted encouragement, but cringed to see her shove down each blah bite. She somehow managed but the fight seemed to go out of her at that point.

Here came #5. UGH. It looked bigger than all the rest. Patsy knew she had to eat it all because the current champion had eaten 4 ½. She must have had a surge of willpower since the first half of the banana split actually went down OK, but the last half was not a pretty sight: groans and moans. One thing about this contest: you cannot cheat eating banana splits. Ice cream does not fit into pockets nor hide down on the floor. While stuffing in the last several icy bites, Patsy almost choked. She gasped, "Take off the jackets!" She knew what was coming. We all grabbed our jackets and stepped back.

Patsy raced to push open the store screen door, stumbled out into the darkness and then heaved. She lost a lot of ice cream that night, but Pudgy lost a lot of money. After that, she felt a little better and went back inside to be sure they put, "**PATSY BLACKLEDGE, 5 banana splits**", on the board as the new champion. Who knows - that record may still stand.

Banana split hugs from GAP,

P.S. While Da was visiting here recently, he brought up photos onto my computer which showed your recent birthday party. So now I know you're officially twelve, not thirteen. That means I'm 61 years ahead of you in Life. Yipes. I remember back to 12. It was FUN.